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ABSTRACT

This report examines family involvement in elementary and secondary education, focusing on special concerns for schools in Hawaii and the Pacific Islands. The report identifies barriers to family involvement found among culturally diverse populations and suggests positive directions aimed at overcoming those barriers. Following an introduction, the report discusses the numerous components of family involvement and notes that family, school, and community are three major interrelated spheres of influences on a child's life that can work toward academic success or impede progress. Barriers among culturally diverse populations are described, including prior history of discrimination, generational differences in acculturation, language differences and misconceptions about school, teachers' beliefs and attitudes, and issues of community identity. Barriers posing unique challenges for educators in the Pacific Islands include the lack of a clear definition of family involvement, issues related to the schooling process, cultural barriers, religious priorities, and a belief in the separation of school and home. The report identifies positive directions in family involvement efforts nationwide, including the priority placed on family involvement in the U.S. National Education Goals and the empowerment model to provide an organizational structure for parent involvement programs. Positive directions in the Pacific are presented, including the support for site-based management and the development of a network of parent-community networking centers. The report concludes with recommendations related to emphasizing the value of family involvement in education, identifying relevant barriers to family involvement, seeking culturally appropriate

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solutions, and using professional development opportunities to enhance family involvement. (Contains 41 references.) (KB)

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# Family Involvement in Education: A Synthesis of Research for Pacific Educators

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# Family Involvement in Education: A Synthesis of Research for Pacific Educators

by **Denise L. Onikama**
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May 1998

*Engin kehlap.*— Pohnpeian proverb

*"The contributions of each family member provide for the betterment of the community."*

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## Introduction

**Family involvement in children's learning was a part of traditional culture in the Pacific region.**

There was a time in the Pacific, not so long ago, when there was no such thing as "school." Learning took place everywhere — in the home, learning to plait pandanus into finely woven mats and baskets; in the fields, learning to cultivate taro and yams; on the sea, learning to navigate between islands. Family and community were inextricably interwoven, like strands of pandanus, into a coherent "school" of learning.

Schools of today, unlike traditional learning settings, are often disconnected from home and community. As students enter school, their families may feel detached from the learning process. How can families, communities, and schools overcome barriers and work together for the benefit of the children? How can they become, once again, like closely woven mats, providing a strong and integrated foundation for learning?

Much research in the last 20 years has supported family involvement as a positive influence on children's learning. This paper will not traverse that now-familiar territory. Rather, it will focus on *barriers* to family involvement found among culturally diverse populations, especially in the Pacific. It will also suggest some *positive* directions aimed at overcoming those barriers. The purpose of this presentation is to increase the awareness of Pacific educators and others interested in the interplay of culture and family involvement in education.

**There are many barriers to family involvement in education.**

Some barriers to family involvement in education cross all cultures and groups, for example:

- Families may lack the means to help their children learn and become socialized. They may not know how to approach schools in order to become involved (Mannan & Blackwell, 1992).
- Schools may not know how to effectively encourage families to participate (Ortner, 1994).
- School staff interest may vary in terms of commitment to family involvement, and may generate mixed messages to parents (State of Iowa Department of Education, 1996).
- Outreach procedures that are not sensitive to community values can hinder participation (Ortner, 1994).
- Changing school system policies may create instability in the area of soliciting family involvement (Mannan & Blackwell, 1992).

Increasingly, families in the United States and the Pacific region are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. English is often not spoken or understood in the homes of immigrant families. For many Pacific Islanders, the language of instruction (English) is not the language of the home (Pacific Region Educational Laboratory, 1995). As a result, family members may be uncomfortable conversing with school personnel. Those family members who do speak English but have limited education may have difficulty communicating because their life experiences and perspectives are very different from others in the school community (Comer, 1984; Moles, 1993).

Promoting family participation among diverse populations is one of the challenges facing educators. Furthermore, the research shows that it is a very critical challenge since family involvement among culturally different populations is positively related to academic achievement (for example, among Xhosa-speaking families, Cherian, 1995; among Mexican-American families, Keith & Lichtman, 1992).

## What is Family Involvement?

Does family involvement mean attendance at Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings? Does it mean participating in parent-teacher conferences? Does it mean attending school functions? Does it mean fundraising or serving as a classroom resource? It does, but these activities are only part of what is meant by family involvement.

Although some sources in the literature focus on *parent* involvement, the broader term of *family* involvement is used here. It includes all who have responsibility for the care and well-being of children, such as mothers, fathers, grandparents, foster parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and non-custodial parents (Davies, 1991; SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education, 1996).

*Menun nee mesei.*—Chuukese proverb
"Sons and daughters are the treasures of each family clan."

Davies' (1991) review of the research on family involvement reveals three important themes:

1. It helps to ensure that all children have the tools they need for success.

2. It encourages the development of the whole child, including social, emotional, physical, and academic growth and development.

3. It is based on the notion of shared responsibility for the child.

These themes illustrate that family involvement contributes to the development of all aspects of the individual living within a larger society.

**Family involvement has many faces.**

Joyce Epstein (1995), a frequently cited scholar in this area, has created a typology based on six levels of family (parent) involvement.

Parenting—Giving children nurturance and guidance and providing motivation and discipline.

Communicating—Talking regularly with school staff about programs, children's progress, and other school affairs.

Volunteering—Helping with schoolwide and classroom activities.

Learning at Home—Assisting student learning through help with homework and other curriculum-related activities.

Decision Making—Participating in school decision making; becoming a parent leader or representative.

Collaborating with Community—Identifying and integrating family and community resources to strengthen school programs and student learning.

By developing awareness of the levels of family involvement, schools can let family members know that there are many different ways in which they can participate in the education of their children.

*Ho'okahi ka 'ilau like ana.*— Hawaiian voyaging proverb
"Wield the paddles together. Work together."

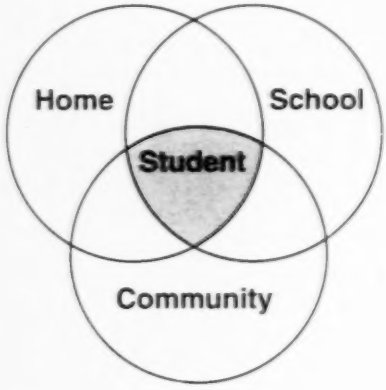
**Family involvement is part of a larger picture.**

The work of Comer and Haynes (1991), Epstein (1995), and other researchers points out that family, school, and community are three major interrelated spheres of influence on a child's life. They are parts of a larger whole that can either work toward academic success or, conversely, can impede progress.

Because they are part of a larger whole, these spheres are themselves influenced by societal factors, such as cultural values and economic conditions.

The following figure shows how the three components interrelate. It is based on the concepts of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and their subsequent adaptation by James Garbarino (1992).

Figure 1




The innermost core is the individual child. The child has face-to-face interactions with those most influential in his or her life, including parents, other family members, teachers, and church members.

There are also important interactions between home and school, school and community, and community and home. These are strongly influential in the life of a child, depending on the frequency and quality of the interconnections. Negative or conflicting relationships may place a child at risk in all three settings.

Events outside the home, school, and community are also important in a child's life. Examples include parents' work obligations, school board priorities, recreational pursuits, and religious activities. A decision made by a school board might directly affect the school curriculum. If it conflicts with family values and beliefs, then the support a family gives to education might be decreased.

As Pacific educators look at barriers to family involvement, they must acknowledge the complexities of home, school, and community interactions and realize that events at all levels can and do affect the lives of children, directly or indirectly.

## Barriers Among Culturally Diverse Populations

**Some barriers seem unique to certain cultural groups.**

Some examples of barriers to family involvement in culturally diverse populations can be found throughout the United States.

### Prior history of discrimination

In their cross-cultural work with families involved in the special education decision-making process, Salend and Taylor (1993) examined barriers to participation among culturally diverse families. They found that a prior history of discrimination is a barrier. For example, many families may not attend meetings at public institutions such as the school if they experienced either discrimination or disrespect there in the past. A shared distrust of schools among Native American families is based upon historical and personal discrimination from the dominant culture (Cockrell, 1992). It is difficult for families to want to become involved with institutions that they perceive are "owned" by a culture that discriminated against them in the past.

### Belief in authority of the school

Espinosa (1995) studied specific cultural characteristics among Hispanic parents that conflict with American socialization patterns. For example, in the Hispanic culture there is a belief (among the lower socio-economic class) in the authority of the school and its teachers. In a number of Latin American countries it is considered rude for a parent to intrude into the domain of the school. As a result, family participation in a child's formal education is not a common practice. In addition, parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are frequently intimidated by school personnel and reluctant to raise concerns or make demands.

### Acculturation differences between generations

In another study of barriers to parental involvement, Shoho (1992) looked at Japanese-American parents' perceptions spanning three generations in Hawai'i: *Issei* (first generation), *Nissei* (second generation), and *Sansei* (third generation). The study identified five factors that were barriers to parental involvement:

- Inability to communicate effectively in English;
- Low degree of Americanization;
- Unfamiliarity with American schooling;
- The struggle for economic survival; and
- Limited educational background.

**Language differences and misconceptions about school negatively affect family involvement.**

Among the groups studied, first-generation parents were found to be the ones least involved in the education of their children. Language was cited as being the primary obstacle. Also, there was a common feeling among these parents that they should leave the education of their children to public schools. Teachers were held in high esteem and rarely questioned.

### Parents' lack of confidence

Parents do not believe in their own effectiveness and capabilities. Swick (1988) stated that parents' beliefs in their own abilities affect the extent to which they are involved. Parents who are outside the cultural mainstream may feel that they are not capable of contributing to their children's education. Thus, they are less likely to become involved in school activities.

### Need for cultural sensitivity in planning activities

The conditions necessary to elicit participation from Spanish-speaking parents were examined in a four-year study (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). In terms of parental participation at school, results showed differences between conventional and non-conventional activities. Specific cultural knowledge is not required in order to involve parents in conventional activities (i.e.,"open-house," parent-teacher conferences). Non-conventional activities (i.e., parents as co-teachers, shared decision making regarding curriculum), on the other hand, encourage parents to participate in their children's education when communication is culturally responsive. This study highlights the need for school personnel to understand the cultural perspectives of parents they wish to involve at the school.

### Misinterpretation of non-confrontational style

Lack of participation does not necessarily mean lack of interest. Many school administrators and teachers misinterpret the hesitancy and non-involvement of Hispanic parents as a lack of caring about their children's education (Inger, 1992). This type of misperception often leads to mutual distrust and suspicion between parents and school personnel.

### Misperceptions of parental roles

School personnel often regard mothers as the primary caregivers in the family, and therefore direct most communications about a child's school performance to his or her mother. Under these circumstances, paternal involvement may not be encouraged, and fathers may even receive messages implying that it is not welcomed. Research by Brody, Stoneman, and Flor (1995) suggests that perceptions about the role of parents in school involvement may create barriers. In the Pacific, where the tasks of care-giving are often shared among many adults in the extended family or clan, this research may explain some of the complexities affecting family involvement in the region.

**Teachers' beliefs and attitudes affect family participation.**

### Teachers' lack of confidence and negative attitudes

A review of work by Greenwood and Hickman (1991) concerning teacher efficacy in terms of encouraging parental involvement suggests that attention should be given to educators' attitudes and beliefs. For example, many teachers and administrators believe that the benefits of parental involvement do not outweigh the problems involved. Others simply do not believe they have the ability to effectively involve parents. Such doubts present barriers to effective collaboration between schools and families.

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1987) posited that a teacher's belief in his or her own teaching effectiveness is the strongest predictor of successful parental involvement. The authors found a significant correlation between the level of teacher efficacy and the degree of parental involvement in parent-teacher conferences, parent volunteer programs, parent tutoring, parent home instruction, and parent support.

### Misunderstanding specific cultural patterns

In her work with Asian immigrant families, Yao (1988) discovered that schools need to use strategies that are responsive to the unique cultural characteristics of parents. Asian parents are often perceived as being quiet, non-assertive, and reserved during discussions with teachers or school administrators. In addition, they are often reluctant to admit problems or to seek professional help outside the family. For these reasons, the school must take the initiative to provide them with needed information or involve them in problem solving when their children encounter difficulties at school.

Asian parents' lack of knowledge about American society and its school system can create anxiety and confusion about a child's schooling. Some parents may feel intimidated by their children, who seem to adapt to the new culture better than they are able to do. In some families, the roles of parents and children become reversed due to the parents' limited English proficiency.

Teachers and Asian parents may have conflicting ideas about the characteristics of an ideal child and might hold differing beliefs about the importance of social life and extracurricular activities. Teachers, for example, are often not able to understand why Asian immigrant children frequently do not participate in competitive sports.

Teachers and school administrators must pay close attention to nonverbal communication as well, according to Yao. Posture, gestures, and facial expressions convey messages to parents about how they are regarded by school personnel.

Folded arms or tightly crossed legs seem unfriendly to Asian immigrant parents. A slouched posture may express an uncaring attitude. Calling a person by beckoning with an index finger is culturally inappropriate for most Asians, who apply this gesture only to animals. Direct eye contact, an important aspect of Western communication, is considered impolite by some Asian parents, who therefore may not look directly at the teacher during a conference.

### Issues of community identity

A qualitative study undertaken by Cockrell (1992) examined, from a Native-American parent's perspective, the process of parent-school communication in a consolidated rural district. Barriers such as poor communication between parents and school, past and present racial tension, the desire to maintain tribal identity, and a general distrust of the school were found to hinder family involvement. The study concluded that the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individual educators are fundamentally important to the educational process. Students are more likely to learn in an environment in which they feel accepted and valued, and parents are more likely to become involved at the school if they feel welcome and respected. The study also found that the imposition of an ethnocentric cultural view upon an institution such as the school prevents the inclusion of culturally different people. Culturally diverse people must be actively engaged in the identification of educational problems and the search for solutions. "Their voices and their stories must be heard, recorded, and analyzed" (Cockrell, 1992, p. 8).

**Working parents and low-income families face unique issues.**

### Working parents have special needs

Parents of young students have particular issues with which to contend. In the United States, more than half of the women with children under six years of age are in the labor force (King, 1990). One of the issues facing educators today is how to effectively involve working families. Employed parents face different challenges than parents who do not work. Following is a list of factors that may affect the relationship between an employed parent and the school:

- Feelings of competition between parent and caregiver for the child's affection;
- Feelings of guilt on the part of employed parents who may wonder if they are abandoning their children during work hours;
- Lack of time to participate in school activities (King, 1990); and
- Workplace leave policies that make parental participation difficult (Ascher, 1988).

### Social class differences

Low-income families face unique obstacles to participation in education. Lareau's (1993) ethnographic research explored social class influences on parent involvement in schooling. Conducted in predominantly Caucasian working-class and upper middle-class communities, Lareau found that family-school relationships within working-class and upper middle-class communities varied.

Her study revealed that teachers and administrators have different expectations of parents based on the parents' social standing. Working-class parents want their children to do well, but, like Hispanic parents, tend to give educational responsibility to the teacher. Upper middle-class parents, on the other hand, view themselves as partners in their children's educational process and expect to be involved.

Schools have many challenges to overcome while working toward family involvement in education. In many instances, the school and parents might lack the appropriate skills to communicate effectively with each other, and the surrounding community may not know how to help schools and families bridge the cultural gap.

## Barriers in the Pacific

The State of Hawai'i provides a good example of cultural diversity. Residents include families from a number of different ethnicities: Caucasian, Japanese, Hawaiian, Filipino, Samoan, African-American, Chinese, and others (The State of Hawai'i Data Book, 1995). Encouraging school involvement among minority families with school-aged children presents a challenge for local educators. In their study of the Honolulu District Chapter I Program, Yap and Enoki (1994) conducted several case studies at selected sites in the Honolulu District. Specific barriers to effective family involvement were identified by case studies and include:

- *Lack of time* — Many parents hold down two or three jobs in order to cope with economic realities. Work schedules prevent these parents from attending meetings and other events at the school.
- *Language barrier* — Lack of English proficiency often hampers communication between immigrant families.

- *Cultural differences* — Differences in cultural values affect family involvement. In some cultures, family involvement at school is valued; in others, its priority is lower.
- *English as a second language* — In immigrant families as well as among the local population, lack of English proficiency often makes it difficult for parents to read with their children at home.
- *Student attitude* — Students, especially at the secondary level, may not welcome their parents' presence at the school and may discourage their parents' participation in school activities.

There is little published information about Pacific Island family participation beyond Hawai'i. In order to provide more insight into family involvement in the Pacific, the authors conducted a series of interviews with Pacific residents involved with Pacific Resources for Education and Learning and its Research and Development (R&D) Cadre, Pacific Curriculum and Instruction Council (PCIC), and Pacific Educator in Residence Program. This section presents findings from those interviews.

**No clear picture of what parent participation means in the Pacific region**

A fundamental barrier to family involvement in Pacific education is an unclear definition of family involvement. In addition, family involvement is not closely aligned with the cultures of the Pacific region. For instance, when parents do get involved in their children's education, they are not given a culturally appropriate form of recognition because their involvement is not seen as socially attractive or desirable. In cultures where title holding and social class standing are seen as important, participation in education must become socially desirable to be viewed as important. Presently, attending school functions receives considerably less social value than holding titles and receiving public recognition. Thus, participation in school activities does not carry as much weight as attendance at a village feast, where participation is imperative.

Given this lack of understanding regarding family participation within the cultural contexts of Pacific Islanders, it is understandable that many parents and some Pacific educators do not feel responsible for family involvement. Some Pacific educators commented that parents do not "carry their portion of the load." They feel that parents often "dump" their children at school and give up their responsibility for the educational development of their children. Some Pacific educators feel that, because some parents pay tuition for private education, these parents assume more responsibility for their children's education and take a more active role in their children's academic lives. Because public school is not an inherent part of the traditional culture, parents may see themselves as outsiders rather than stakeholders in the school.

### Issues of schooling

Numerous barriers to family involvement are embedded within the process of schooling. In some islands, the responsibility to involve parents is assigned solely to the principal. If the principal has a positive relationship and communication rapport with the parents, it is likely that there will be strong parent participation in school affairs. If the school administrator places a low priority on parent involvement or does not communicate well, parents and family members may be made to feel unwelcome and unwanted at the school.

Communication plays a vital role in family involvement. For families to become involved in education, there must be two-way communication between the home and the school. Such, however, is not always the case. Some parents, especially at the secondary level, are only contacted when there is a problem. This can be very discouraging for parents. In some instances, communication with the family occurs only when the child receives special services. At Ebeye Public School in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, school administrators noted that many parents who attend PTA meetings are parents of students enrolled in special education programs. Teachers reported that the most interaction they have with many parents is when parents come to school to pick up their children's report cards (Heine & Lee, 1997). Positive, frequent communication encourages parents to take a more active interest in their children's education.

Closely related to the role of communication is the scheduling of meetings between teachers and parents. In many instances, siblings do not attend the same school. However, because communication between school and home is ineffective, school officials often overlook these factors, scheduling meetings and functions in the same time slots as those of other schools. As a result, parents are unable to attend all of their children's meetings and activities. Furthermore, the school may schedule meeting times that are not convenient for parents and other family members.

### Cultural barriers

Some of the barriers facing family involvement may be cultural in nature. It could be argued that Pacific educators may not be skillful at family involvement issues due to cultural reasons — perhaps their cultures simply have not provided them with the requisite skills. Currently, schools do not encourage or assist in the development of these skills among their teachers. The interviews conducted for this study confirmed knowledge that is well documented by research: In general, teachers and school administrators do not know how to increase parent involvement and do not know how to capitalize on their own cultural backgrounds in classrooms and in dealings with families. As a result, families may

become isolated and distanced from the school. Pacific educators, like educators elsewhere, need training in order to learn and incorporate strategies that will involve families in their children's education. Unfortunately, this type of training is usually not included in teacher training pre-service programs.

There may be uncomfortable interactions between families and schools for cultural reasons. For example, there is a potential language problem between parents and school staff because school systems tend to use English to communicate; however, many parents feel more comfortable conversing in their native language. The pattern of teacher-parent communication may be perceived as THEM vs. US. Furthermore, rather than asking parents to participate, schools often tell parents what they must do. This results in a negative perception that the school is demanding and not family-friendly.

The conditions under which parents meet and communicate with teachers may also present a cultural barrier. Sometimes the physical aspects of the parent-teacher meeting area (classroom, conference room, school office) may seem contrived and uncomfortable for local parents. A desk between the parties creates a physical barrier that can make relations uneasy. The desk and chair arrangement, so typical of classrooms on the U.S. Mainland, is not a normal part of some Pacific cultures.

Symptomatic of the gap between home and school is the nature of the school's curriculum. It was noted that the blending of home and school skills is not yet a recognized part of the curriculum. For example, in Pohnpei State, yam planting is a highly valued activity requiring skills taught at home. However, these particular skills are not incorporated into the curriculum at school. Only at home are children taught where and how to plant yams and under which type of tree they should be planted, so that the vines grow profusely and cover the tree's trunk and branches. Most knowledge and activities learned at home are not integrated with schoolwork.

**Some Pacific island barriers reflect unique cultural conditions.**

### Cultural and religious priorities

In many instances, community comes first. Therefore, if a village or community event takes place at the same time as a school event, the former takes precedence. Also, respect for traditional chiefs involves obedience; the wishes of the chief must be obeyed whether or not one agrees. Likewise, in some communities, the church plays a vital role in the community or larger society. School activities may take a backseat to church activities that require the participation of parents.

### Physical conditions in the home

Physical conditions in the home may create barriers. There is often no area set aside at home for parents to assist their children with school work. In the Pacific region, homes often do not have tables on which to work or electricity to provide adequate lighting after dark (Asian Development Bank, 1995). In addition, homes may lack running water (water must be obtained from a nearby river), privacy for studying, and reading materials.

### Separation of school and home

A pervasive belief among Pacific Islanders (similar to the traditional Hispanic belief) is that the school is separate from the home. School is seen as an independent, government-run organization. Teachers and school administrators are given full responsibility for a child's education (Asian Development Bank, 1995). Teachings about lineage and traditional culture are left to the family, but modern curricular instruction is regarded as the responsibility of the teacher and school.

## Positive Directions in Family Involvement

*E auau le tavau I ona fulu.*— Samoan proverb
"The seagull invests pride in his feathers. Parents invest pride in their children."

**Family involvement in education is a widely valued goal.**

### National goal and standards

Promoting family involvement has become a priority for schools in the United States. Goal 8 of the U.S. National Education Goals says that by the year 2000, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children." (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

The recent formula included in the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs is one of the most promising developments in the promotion of family involvement in education. These standards serve as guidelines and have been endorsed by more than 30 professional education and parent/family involvement organizations. Following are the National Standards:

**National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs**

**Standard I:** Communicating — Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

**Standard II:** Parenting — Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

**Standard III:** Student Learning — Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

**Standard IV:** Volunteering — Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

**Standard V:** School Decision Making and Advocacy — Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

**Standard VI:** Collaborating with Community — Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

(Parent Teacher Association, 1997)

Although these standards are designed for use on the U.S. Mainland, they are appropriate for the Pacific region as well. Implementation of the standards in any setting requires joint effort between home, school, and community.

The challenges for effective family involvement in Pacific Island schools are numerous. However, at this time, positive events point to promising directions that Pacific Islanders can take to promote family involvement in education within their unique contexts. Following are selected examples of promising programs, practices, and perspectives that Pacific educators may wish to consider as a starting point in their efforts to promote family involvement in Pacific education.

### Funds of knowledge

Most programs that solicit parental involvement have been designed to serve a specific population of parents (e.g., English-speaking, English as a Second Language Learners, economically disadvantaged). Recent demographic data, however, indicate that schools are serving an increasing number of students and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds who may not respond to traditional methods for building family-school partnerships (Salend & Taylor, 1993).

Soliciting family involvement in education transcends culture and plays a vital role in student educational outcomes. A student's culture can provide educators with an important resource for learning. Rather than viewing minority students and homes as "deficient," Moll (1992) views the environments of students and families as valued sources of knowledge that should be tapped by schools. These "funds of knowledge" contain important cultural information used by households in order to function. To draw upon these "funds," the school must gather information about students, parents, and the community, and use this knowledge to encourage involvement at school. For example, families and other community members can be asked to contribute to the development of lessons, or to bring their unique viewpoints to the school setting.

**Empowerment model**

The empowerment model proposed by Shepard and Rose (1995) provides an organizational structure for parent involvement programs. This model views parents as vital sources of information – as "funds of knowledge" – capable of making meaningful contributions to their children's lives and to their communities. The goal of empowerment is not to "change" people, but to provide them with the tools to better enable them to manage their lives. Empowerment models are built upon a "Big Picture" approach. All three spheres of influence are addressed in developing family involvement programs based on the empowerment model.

The empowerment model advanced by Shepard and Rose consists of four ascending steps beginning with *basic communication:* parents forge an initial link with their child's teacher or school. The next step, *home improvement* (located in the "home" sphere) includes activities designed to enhance parenting skills in general and/or skills related to improving a child's home-learning environment. The two highest stages of empowerment, *volunteering* and *advocacy*, involve social connections beyond the home. They relate to the spheres of "school" and "community." Parental efficacy reaches higher levels as parents learn to assist and interact with other parents and students at school through volunteering (stage three). Parents also feel empowered when they work with local, community, and state agencies to improve education (stage four).

The highest level of involvement and empowerment is achieved when parents are able to set policies and influence decision making at their schools. The likelihood that parents will participate at this level increases when they have acquired the knowledge, confidence, and sense of belonging required for effective involvement.

**Success has been shown with site-based management.**

### School/Community-Based Management (SCBM)

Across the nation and in the Pacific region, School/Community-Based Management (SCBM), also known as site-based management, is gaining stronger support as a means of improving schooling. The movement toward SCBM in Hawai'i started in December 1988 when Superintendent of Education Charles Toguchi and key members of his staff visited Dade County Public Schools in Florida to study their site-based management system. In Hawai'i, the word "community" was added to emphasize the importance of involving the community in the process (Ikeda, 1992).

The 1989 Hawai'i State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1870, which enabled SCBM to become a reality. The bill became law through Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS), Chapter 296C. This law requires that six role groups–parents, teachers, principals, students, support staff, and other community members–become part of the school's decision-making group (Koki, 1997).

Elsewhere in the Pacific region, interest in SCBM is growing. In Guam, Harmon Loop Elementary School has been an SCBM pilot site. Over the years, Chuuk State in the Federated States of Micronesia has been building the foundation for SCBM implementation. Principals and community members in Yap State have received training in the process, and it is now being implemented on the outer Island of Woleai.

Evaluations conducted on Hawai'i's experiences with SCBM have shown positive gains as a result of SCBM implementation. PREL's evaluation of the program found that SCBM provides a flexible structure that responds to the unique personality of a community. Schools can be custom-made for the communities they serve (Pacific Region Educational Laboratory, 1992).

An evaluation of SCBM conducted by the Far West Laboratory (now WestEd) revealed that SCBM has a significant impact on school decision-making practices. It was also found that decision making and school-community connections are strongly linked. In addition to increased parent and community involvement and support, other outcomes, such as the Parent-Community Networking Center (Izu, n.d.) were realized.

Although they represent significant findings that are difficult to isolate, some positive outcomes for key individuals – parents, teachers, and students – have

been associated with SCBM. Parents who participated in the evaluation process reported extreme confidence and satisfaction with their children's schools. Measures of teacher work satisfaction also showed improvement. At nearly all schools evaluated, collaboration improved among teachers and other staff, and most teachers were committed to SCBM goals and activities (Izu, n.d.).

In October 1996, a survey report on the implementation of SCBM in Hawai'i's schools was released. The report presents findings from a survey that was conducted at the request of the Board of Education. It involved more than 240 respondents who attended the February 1996 SCBM Conference in Honolulu. Ninety-six SCBM schools were involved in the survey.

Results indicate that consensus-based decision making appears to be working well at many SCBM schools. In general, SCBM council representatives appear to be doing a "pretty good" job of consulting with people in their role groups. Access to information about SCBM council activities is adequate.

These results also indicate that each SCBM school attempted to translate the concept of broad-based participation into practice in a way that was workable for the school. Broad-based school participation and the extent of "off-limit" areas varied among SCBM schools, depending on the people involved, the school's culture, and other factors.

The movement toward SCBM represents a major change. Like other change efforts, successful implementation of the process takes time, resources, and desire. The transition to SCBM, when successful, is both pervasive and deep. It requires change in almost all aspects of the school – structures, roles, systems, instructional practices, human resource practices, and participants' skills and knowledge.

Implementing such a change effort is a gradual process that involves introducing and refining changes until all aspects of the school's organization support the new way of operating. While the needs of each school differ, SCBM continues to be a viable option for school improvement and educational restructuring in the Pacific region; it will enhance school/community involvement and increase student achievement (Koki, 1997).

### Parent-Community Networking Centers (PCNC)

The Hawai'i State Department of Education has been developing a network of Parent-Community Networking Centers (PCNC) with the intent of having a PCNC in every school in the public school system.

PCNCs are drop-in centers located on school campuses. Their mission is to develop a sense of community between home, school, and neighborhood. The goal is to provide a gathering place for parents, teachers, and community resource people. A major force behind the creation of PCNCs was the need to involve parents and families more significantly in the education of their children and in school affairs. Each center is run by a part-time facilitator who works closely with the principal and who may not necessarily have formal credentials (Ing, 1993). In essence, the PCNC represents the establishment of a structural means to support efforts for involving parents in education.

The first PCNC was established in 1986, when the Hawai'i State Board of Education and Hawai'i State Legislature passed Chapter 301, Sections 1 to 4, Hawai'i Revised Statutes. This legislation established a network of six PCNCs and recognized parent and community involvement as essential for effective public education in Hawai'i.

The PCNC is based on successful community education experiences as well as newly developed models that grew out of successful PCNC experiences. The PCNC uses relationship, team-building, community education, nesting support, and other models drawn from PCNC experiences. The intent of all of these models is to create a sense of community wherever people are living (Ing, 1993).

The PCNCs encourage a loving and caring school climate, where all partners in learning feel supported and valued. As families, schools, and communities work in harmony, families are strengthened and develop a sense of pride, accomplishment, and community (Koki, 1997).

While PCNCs differ in terms of activities, they are bound by a unifying characteristic – a conscious and deliberate effort to include the "ways of community" in everything. The challenge is not to resist community influences but to consciously energize and realize what is already inherent in each individual – the capacity to create community at higher levels (Ing, 1993).

Experience has shown that the key to success is the selection of a PCNC facilitator who has credibility with community members and families. In addition, effective PCNC implementation relies on the provision of relevant and systematic training for the PCNC facilitator. The following elements have been identified by facilitators as being of critical importance:

- Relationships – Identify needs and build connections with parents.

- Ownership – Parents begin to take ownership and to support teachers in partnership building.

- Commitment – Teachers consciously initiate the community-building process in the classroom.

- Learning Community – Parents, teachers, and students begin bonding as a natural outcome of the three stages mentioned above (Koki, 1997).

The PCNC experiences in Hawai'i have revealed that the processes of community making are the processes of learning.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Some general conclusions can be drawn from this review of research:

1. Family involvement is multi-faceted and complex. There are many types of family involvement in education. In developing a family involvement program, Pacific educators need to consider the cultural, linguistic, and economic factors that are relevant to the unique needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children and families.

2. Home, school, and community are three major spheres of influence on children. Their interactions may be either positive or negative, close or distant, growth promoting or growth discouraging. They range from one-on-one interactions with the child to events occurring in the society itself. All three major spheres of influence should be considered in efforts to promote family involvement in education.

3. Some barriers to participation, such as lack of time and knowledge about how to become involved, cut across all cultures and peoples. Other barriers, such as language differences and distrust of schools, are important to consider in the culturally diverse settings of the Pacific.

4. Family involvement in the Pacific may have some unique barriers. For example, religious and cultural priorities of the community may often affect the level of family participation in school functions. Barriers that result from the community's culture raise special challenges for Pacific educators when soliciting family involvement at the school.

On the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The value and importance of family involvement in education should be continuously emphasized by Pacific Island communities. In some Pacific schools, family participation may not be fully understood or accepted as an important aspect of the schooling process. Implementing a system such as School/Community-Based Management (SCBM) can be an important step. Its rationale and operational procedures, however, must be adequately developed prior to implementation.

2. Pacific Island schools need to identify relevant barriers to family involvement that pertain to their own circumstances. A good way to begin involving parents in education is to engage them in discussions on the barriers presented in this publication. School administrators may present concerns at community forums and solicit the support of village chiefs and leaders.

3. After identifying barriers, the schools may then seek culturally appropriate solutions. Again, parents and community members are valuable resources for identifying and implementing solutions.

4. Throughout the Pacific, teachers are seeking to further their professional development. The curriculum for teacher training programs should include learning opportunities directed towards increasing family involvement. These learning opportunities should provide not only the necessary awareness and knowledge, but also the skills needed to engage family participation in education.

*A'ohe hana nui ka alu'ia.* –Ancient Hawaiian proverb
"No task is too big when done together."

As barriers are overcome, school, home, and community can once again find common ground. They can be woven together, like pandanus mats, into a foundation that supports and fosters student learning.

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